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ARTISTS.

ARY SCHEFFER'S TEMPTATION.

It is not often that a picture of the real greatness of Ary Scheffer's Temptation is offered to the study of an American public; and we fear that even the favorable attention it has received is not so much as it demanded. It is a picture not only artistic, but philosophical. There is evidence not only of the painter's powers, but of the moralist's and the metaphysician's. The story is perfectly told. There was no need of a name, nor was there even need of the traditional halo and bat-wings to distinguish the personages. They are plainly the embodiments of the extremes of evil and good—that is, the nearest approach to the extremes that the artist could make. There is much reprobation thrown away on every artist who attempts to represent Christ—thrown away, we say, because it is useless to deter others from making the attempt, and it is as unintelligent as idle. Every man has an ideal of good, which, if he attempts to embody, it assumes a form of humanity. If he be a Christian artist, although only in the forms of faith, it is a Christ, who is to him the highest embodiment of human worth. It is well worth consideration, why every attempt at this is considered by everybody but the artist—and in most cases also by him—a failure. It is really because every man's ideal of humanity is shaped by the tendency of his own organization. If we cast away the traditional ideas of Christ, and accept him as he is artistically, a perfect man, it is evident that no two men could precisely agree as to the exact form of that perfection, unless we could find two men precisely alike in their mental and spiritual natures. Ask an athlete what his ideal of humanity is, and he would tell you probably—the combatant of the Louvre. Ask Voltaire, and he would have told you—a man of giant intellect, dead to all the superstitious and the fears of common humanity. But ask the Christian, and Holy Writ answers for him—a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. Beyond those ideals neither class can comprehend any attainment of humanity, and no higher therefore can their Christ be. There may be an idea of something supernatural attached to him, but this removes him at once from the reach of Art, since that can express nothing which has not palpable form. It may suggest it as by the halo and the bat-wing, but these are mere hieroglyphics; take them away and the Christ or the Satan stands as each man conceives him, as nearly as his powers of representation avail him. As every artist must feel in each Christ painted, some deficiency which an added faculty in his own nature would supply, he will attempt to perfect the ideal, forgetting that he himself must probably have some vacancy which his predecessor had filled. We believe it to be a position which no one will assail, that no man can represent in Christ a nobler man than he himself *might be*, since truly each man's better self is his standard of his fellows, and beyond that he can see nothing. That Ary Scheffer's Christ should not be our Christ is not a fault, then, but a necessity. It is likely that his painted Christ again falls much be-

hind his conception of him, since no man can realize all that he conceives.

It is idle, then, to pass judgment on a representation of Christ, since the moral character of every man determines his power to comprehend him; and though we may claim, and substantiate our claim to intellectual acumen, it would be a presumption which the universal world would cry down, should we claim a moral elevation lofty enough to judge the moral ideals of others. The most Christ-like man would best paint Christ—supposing, of course, that his executive talent were sufficient for his purposes. It is nothing, then, that we say that this Christ is the noblest we have ever seen, though we do really think it to be such.

Yet there are certain qualities, which all receiving the Christian ideal of the Great Teacher agree in—and certain others which we may draw from the gospels and which will serve as a guide to an intellectual comparison of our moral ideals of him. He was a "man of sorrows," borne down by a mission almost too heavy for him to endure its weight—saddened by the woe and misery of a world cast upon his sympathy. All that is said of him indicate a womanly fervor and harmony of disposition—a deep and intense love pervading every thought and action—a gentleness, only broken in upon by his indignant outbursts against those who dealt in human souls, and who, in the livery of heaven, served their own basest and most selfish purposes. And yet, even against these, that there was no bitterness in him, his "Father forgive them" proves.

This would indicate a perfect balance of character, which the predominance of the intellectual that many demand would destroy. There is no need or right to suppose a great intellectual power in Christ, since he continually tells us he is acted through, and does not act from himself. His life, his teachings, and we thence may well conclude, his disposition, pointed to the child-like, the gentle and faithful, as the highest attainment of humanity—and to that as the highest wisdom which is revealed unto babes, and hidden from the wise and prudent.

Conceive if you can these qualities beneath the beetling brow of a Webster; conceive if you can the unfathomable tenderness and self-denying spirit of Christ in the cold eye and rhetorical mind of an intellectual man; but if you cannot—as we believe—look back to that mild, submissive, womanly face which Scheffer has portrayed, and learn the great law that, "higher purity is greater strength," that the mightiest force is that of gentleness! No, no! Here is the secret of the poet's existence—that the divine intuition and the pure feeling are the qualities which admit us into the hidden laws of Being. Is not the artist right, then, in denying his Christ the marks of ponderous intellect?

Yet we hardly know if it be praise or blame that we admit that the Satan is better than the Christ, if indeed we are correct in this admission. *Facilis descensus Averni*—it is easier to come down to the contemplation of character than to climb up to it—and we believe that every man may judge from himself more correctly of the ideal of evil than of that of good. If we have been presuming enough to pass

judgment on the Christ, we may also presume to say of the Satan that to our mind it is the only thorough conception of him that there is. It is the real Miltonic archangel—of proud, commanding port,—given that which the Christ was denied, the fullness of intellect (which, after all, only led to his fall), and of a perfect physical beauty, yet with evil stamped on every line of his face. It is no low, contemptible devil this, no monkish conception of him, but a mighty mind, a subtle tempter, and a worthy antagonist of the Pure One. A prince he is, indeed, proudly displaying his empires, a willingly given price for a victory over the Son of God—nay, you feel that he would give himself, also, to be avenged of his Almighty enemy—his whole soul is so thrown into that great temptation. No silken smile veils his face—but boldly offering the worthiest bribe in his power, he waits the reply, already indicated by the gently upraised hand of the Tempted.

The action of the Satan, is, in the highest degree, indicative of the tendency and nature of the evil which he embodies; ever towards excess. The muscular exertion is extreme—every fibre of his frame is convulsed with the ungoverned energy of his feeling, and the angular character is carried to a degree only short of exaggeration. The hands distended to their widest, and the muscles of the arms and chest knit into angles everywhere, express a moral truth, beautifully opposed by the moderation and heavenly repose of the Christ, who, with his graceful drapery falling from his throat to his feet, and gently gathered to him by his left hand, points with his right to heaven. We do not know in all art a loftier reach of spiritual truth than this—a more perfect antithesis than is in the antagonism of these two figures—the one an embodiment of mad profligate power, and the other of heavenly self-restraint, and faith in the Supreme.

With regard to the technical merits, little need be said. The artist has succeeded in expressing his thought, and that is all that the technique demands. The composition is, as usual with M. Scheffer, a little awkward. The drawing of the Satan is a triumph of which any draughtsmen might be proud. The Christ is rather short, and wanting a little in dignity of figure; whether intentionally or not it is impossible to determine. There may be meaning in it to the artist, and, if so, it would be folly to criticise it as a fault.

How long will it be that we must look entirely to the enterprise of publishers to be favored with the privilege of seeing such works of art?

BROWN'S COLOSSAL EQUESTRIAN STATUE OF WASHINGTON.

We are inclined to believe that common sense is the rarest quality of genius. Grand conceptions are oftener found than the propriety of treatment necessary to set them off to advantage. There is no danger so great to the artist as that of overdoing the thing he undertakes, and, correspondingly, no point so difficult to fix as the proper stopping place. In the treatment of a popular ideal, especially, is this the case, where the general feeling demands a certain heroism of treatment, which